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When You Can't Get There From Here

Text: John 14:1-7

Reaching the Dead End

It is one of the great ironies of history that those who took Jesus to Calvary believed that they were forcing HIM to his dead-end – when, in reality, Jesus had *chosen* to go to that place to address the needs of a world which had come to *its* dead-end. Author Ron Mehl writes about this place in terms of a drive he often takes to the east side of Portland, Oregon over the Marquam Bridge. “On the upper deck of that two-decker freeway,” writes Mehl, “you can catch a glimpse of an exit that drops off into empty space. When the bridge was built back in the mid-1960s, it was designed to accommodate an east-running freeway” which was to take travelers all the way to the heights of magnificent Mount Hood. Mehl says that from the top of that Marquam Bridge on a clear day, “you can [still] see Mount Hood in all its beauty... symmetrical, snow-capped... glistening like a jewel in the distance... And if you look carefully, you can see how the bridge was [originally] built to accommodate a freeway lane veering off to the southeast... But the freeway was never built... the plans for the highway scrapped.” You can see where the road was supposed to go. “It juts out just a bit from the bridge structure, then is cut off as though sliced by a giant knife.” The entrance ramp “permanently blocked, now goes nowhere -- except into the [cold] waters of the Willamette [River] far below.”¹

I'm struck by what a powerful image this is of where humanity finds itself on Good Friday. For many people God has become something like that mountain in Ron Mehl's story. He is little more than a name on an irrelevant roadside sign they've passed so often that they hardly notice it or wonder why someone doesn't take it down. For others, God is a destination they hope to get to some day but certainly not now while they're hurrying to get somewhere elsewhere. For others still, God seems a reality forever shrouded in the distant mists, utterly unknowable. But, now and then, at a moment of clear perception, some of us – maybe you -- catch a glimpse of his glory.

Perhaps you are dented up one of life's collisions or choking on the highway fumes, and suddenly you look up and sense Him there in his towering, unchanging, glistening goodness. Or maybe you look at that little child or through the lens of a microscope or a telescope, and suddenly you find yourself weak-kneed before his exquisite genius, his vast eternity. Or maybe you face the reality of your own failing body or will. You find yourself down in some valley that just gets deeper and darker. You say with the Psalmist: “**I lift up my eyes to the hills; from whence cometh my help?**”² And by some grace from beyond you, you are able to sense that it could come from God. God is great enough to help. You yearn to be close to him, but you can't seem to get there. The gulf is too wide, the distance too great.

Made for the Mountain

There was supposed to be a road. There was supposed to be a permanent way between here and there, between us and Him. The biblical book of Genesis tells us that that was God's plan in the beginning. It was in the original design. But the Bible tells us that sin came like a giant knife, and sliced off the connection between here and there. Man was not meant to live always in the valley. She was not made to see her children slaughtered in the wars that rage in our cities, deserts, and jungles today. He was not made to be enslaved to chemicals or to find his sense of power in the abuse or control of others. Man was made for more than *Entertainment Tonight* and getting *Sexy Back*, for more than *O'Reilly* or *the View*. Man was never meant to go no higher than the top of his constructions.

No, we were made for the mountain. We were made for the crystal clean snows, the pure air, the living water, the dazzling sunshine, the incredible adventure, the stunning serenity, of life with God. In our clearest moments, we know this. We try to reach for our destiny. We build religious systems. We create artwork. We construct moral frameworks. We do charitable works. But corroded and corrupted by sin, even the very best of these things can't really close the gap. It can't span the distance. Our best efforts are not much more than rusted rebar stretching out from crumbling concrete into space -- reaching for the place, the connection, the life for which we were made. And so we sit in traffic, watching the sky get hazier, wistfully wishing that things could be different. But there stands this permanent sign like that one on the phantom eastbound exit from Marquam Bridge that says, "Dead End." You can't get there from here.

On the night in which He was betrayed into the hands of those who would crucify him, Jesus of Nazareth sat in the upper room of a Jerusalem building and said, in effect, to his disciples: "It's time for me to return to the place from which I came." The disciples knew He was not from here. His vision was too clear, his heart was too strong, his spiritual health and power in every way too great to be from this earthly city. Jesus, the angels of Christmas had said, and the disciples now believed, had come from the great manor house on the Mountain.

But now Jesus was going and they were afraid -- afraid that they'd never see him again... afraid that they'd never catch a breath of the mountain air they'd experienced in his presence again... afraid that their journey would screech to a stop at that place at the crest of the hill where the cross-shaped sign said "Dead End." Jesus had told them the cross was coming and knowing that they were afraid, Christ also spoke to them these unforgettable words, recorded for us by the apostle John in chapter 14 of his gospel: **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.** In other words, I'm going to take you to the Mountain.

The Way Making

And then Jesus said: **You know the way to the place where I am going.**" The truth, of course, is that they had no real idea of how they'd ever get to where Jesus was going. Didn't Jesus understand that the highway from here to there did not exist? Did he not see that the sin and brokenness of humanity made it impossible for human beings to get to God? Couldn't he grasp that the world had gotten so polluted that people could hardly even see the *outline* of God anymore? So the patron saint of all us doubting disciples dared to voice what everyone else was probably thinking: **Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"** And Jesus then told them the meaning of Good Friday. No, you do know the way, **Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

If you and I could have been there on Good Friday and witnessed what was actually happening on the invisible spiritual plane, I believe we would weep not for the agony of the Cross but for its Glory. Because what occurred there was so colossal that even scripture only speaks of it in analogies, let me try to put in poetic terms the equivalent of what happened. As sinful men pounded nails through the flesh of Christ, bent on destroying him, Jesus transformed those spikes into spiritual steel bent to the task of building something for them. As the blood poured from his wounds, grace transformed it into spiritual concrete flowing out across eternity. As the blind crowd spat curses from their lips aimed at hurting him further, Jesus rolled words of forgiveness from his lips, smoothing out and firming up what he was making to bless them. As his enemies rejoiced, "We have finished him," Jesus whispered, "**It is finished.**"³ And in the cosmic darkness of that ninth hour, as Jesus "**bowed his head and gave up his spirit,**" only angels and demons could see what the sacrifice of the Son had actually finished – the long-forgotten highway between our city and God's Mountain, between here and there.

This is what happened on Good Friday. Sin and Evil took two pieces of wood and thought to cross Christ out. Jesus turned that wood into a sign that still proclaims across the centuries "Road Open" – Cross Here. "**No one comes to the Father but by me.**" I know this statement bothers some people. It's too particular, not global enough. I can't tell you why God chose to open the entrance to that Road in Jerusalem instead of Mecca, Calcutta, Beijing, or Portland. I just marvel that he opened the Road at all and that now, anyone who wants can travel it.

I know another group of people are bothered by all the blood. Why is a blood sacrifice required or why would God sacrifice his Son? All I can say is that the construction of any road that could span the distance between any world that would slaughter Love itself and any heaven so high and holy it would choose to help the slaughterers -- well, a road that long would obviously be very costly. What but something from within God himself is rich enough to pay that price?

It's an amazing love that meets us at this place today. Come lay at the foot of this signpost, your old self. Let it die here. Let the cleansing, forgiving, life-changing love of Jesus Christ fill you tonight and set you forth on a new path with Him. If you've been on

another path, let tonight be the beginning of a whole new journey. For He who is himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life, bids you come, Cross Here.

Let us pray...

Lord, can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Died he for me, who caused his pain? For me, who him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Amen.

¹ Ron Mehl, *Love Found a Way* (Waterbrook, 1999)

² Psalm 121:1

³ John 19:30